

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT CA
SUBJECT: POSTPONEMENT OF FEDERAL ELECTION UPSETS PQ REFER-
ENDUM TIMETABLE

1. TRUDEAU'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THERE WILL BE NO FEDERAL ELECTIONS THIS SUMMER HAS KNOCKED THE PARTI QUEBECOIS' REFERENDUM TIMETABLE FOR A LOOP, SINCE THE PQ HAS LONG AFFIRMED THAT THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN WOULD NOT BE HELD AT THE SAME TIME AS A FEDERAL ELECTION. A VISIBLY IRRITATED RENE LEVESQUE REACTED TO THE ANNOUNCED POSTPONEMENT BY ATTACKING TRUDEAU AS A "HAMLET" WHO WAS DOING THE PEOPLE A DISSERVICE BY PROLONGING THE ELECTORAL UNCERTAINTY. HE AFFIRMED THAT TWO COULD PLAY THE POSTPONEMENT GAME AND THAT THE GOQ MIGHT PUT OFF ITS OWN REFERENDUM UNTIL 1980 OR EVEN MOVE UP THE REFERENDUM DATE TO THIS FALL (ALTHOUGH THIS WAS "IMPROBABLE").

2. COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT THE PQ WAS CONFIDENTLY ANTICIPATING A JULY ELECTION AND WAS BASING ITS REFERENDUM TIMING ON THAT ASSUMPTION. A JULY ELECTION WOULD HAVE PERMITTED THE PQ TO MAKE PUBLIC ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSALS IN THE FALL
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IN PREPARATION FOR INTRODUCING THE REFERENDUM QUESTION IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EARLY NEXT YEAR AND SETTING THE REFERENDUM DATE ITSELF FOR MAY OR JUNE. THE RENEWED UNCERTAINTY OVER THE FEDERAL ELECTION DATE HAS THROWN A MONKEY-WRENCH INTO THE WORKS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE ELECTION COULD EVEN BE HELD IN THE SPRING, NECESSITATING FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN. AS THE SITUATION STANDS NOW, THE GOQ CANNOT BE SURE

THAT ITS REFERENDUM WILL NOT CONFLICT WITH A FEDERAL ELECTION
UNLESS THE REFERENDUM IS HELD AFTER JUNE, 1979.

3. THE GOQ IS UNDER SEVERE PRESSURE, BOTH FROM WITHIN THE PQ AND
FROM THE OPPOSITION, TO CLARIFY ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PLAN.
IT IS LIKELY. THEREFORE, THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS WILL
BE RELEASED THIS FALL AND THAT THE CAMPAIGN TO WHIP
UP POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE "YES" OPTION WILL BEGIN AT THAT TIME
AS WELL. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, THAT THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON THE REFERENDUM QUESTION AS WELL AS THE
REFERENDUM ITSELF, MAY BE PUT OFF UNTIL THE FALL OF 1979,
BY WHICH TIME THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS MUST HAVE BEEN HELD. AS WE
HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, AN EARLY REFERENDUM IS MORE IN THE PQ
INTEREST THAN A LATE ONE, SINCE THE PQ OPTION MAY WELL BE
DEFEATED IN EITHER CASE AND AN EARLY VOTE WOULD GIVE THE PARTY
MORE TIME TO REGAIN ITS STRENGTH BEFORE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS.
THERE ARE OTHER ALBEIT LESS IMPORTANT, FACTORS FAVORING A SPRING
REFERENDUM: PROVINCIAL LIBERAL LEADER CLAUDE RYAN WOULD
HAVE SOMEWHAT LESS TIME IN WHICH TO DRUM UP POPULAR SUPPORT FOR HIS
OWN
CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS; A REFERENDUM HELD IN THE EARLY
SPRING COULD BE HELD BEFORE FINANCE MINISTER PARIZEAU HAS TO
ISSUE NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET, WHICH MIGHT NOT BE AS POPULAR AS THIS
YEAR'S; AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL, BY FALL OF 1979,
HAVE HAD TIME TO ELABORATE FULLY ITS OWN CONSTITUTIONAL
PROPOSALS AND CONDUCT ITS OWN, NATION-WIDE, REFERENDUM.
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4. LEVESQUE WENT TO SOME LENGTHS TO ACCUSE TRUDEAU OF
"FOSTERING UNCERTAINTY," AN ACCUSATION THAT HAS BEEN MADE REPEATEDLY
AGAINST THE PQ GOVERNMENT ITSELF. LEVESQUE'S TACTIC COULD BACKFIRE,
HOWEVER, SINCE IT SEEMS TO ACKNOWLEDGE FOR THE FIRST TIME
THAT THE CHARGE AGAINST THE PQ HAS SOME VALIDITY.

5. ALTHOUGH WE DOUBT THAT TRUDEAU HAD THE PQ'S REFERENDUM TIMETABLE
UPPERMOST IN HIS MIND WHEN HE DECIDED AGAINST A JULY ELECTION, THERE
IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT HE HAS CAUSED THE PQ MORE CONSTERNATION BY HIS
DECISION THAN ANY OTHER OF OTTAWA'S RECENT MOVES IN THE POLITICAL
BATTLE WITH QUEBEC. M MCNAMARA

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